

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 26, 1986

Executive Registry

86- 1263

Dear Mr. President:

On March 23, United States forces in the Eastern Mediterranean began a peaceful exercise as part of a global Freedom of Navigation program by which the United States preserves its rights to use international waters and air space. This exercise is being conducted entirely in and over areas of the high seas, in accordance with international law and following aviation safety notification procedures.

On March 24, our forces were attacked by Libya. In response, U.S. forces took limited measures of self-defense necessary to protect themselves from continued attack. In accordance with my desire that the Congress be informed on this matter, I am providing this report on the actions taken by United States Armed Forces during this incident.

Shortly before 8:00 a.m. (EST) on March 24, two SA-5 surface-to-air missiles were fired at U.S. aircraft flying over the high seas in the Gulf of Sidra from a Libyan missile installation in the vicinity of Sirte on the northern Libyan coast. During the course of the next few hours, several surface-to-air missiles were fired at U.S. aircraft operating over the high seas. At approximately 3:00 p.m. (EST) these missile installations again activated their target-acquisition radars with the evident objective of firing upon U.S. aircraft. Two HARM air-to-surface missiles were thereupon fired by a U.S. Navy A-7 aircraft, apparently resulting in the destruction of the radars controlling the missile battery. After a short outage, the radar returned to active status and still posed a threat to U.S. forces. At 6:47 p.m., A-7 aircraft again fired two HARM missiles at the SA-5 radar at Sirte. After another short outage, the radar has returned to active status.

Meanwhile, a Libyan missile patrol boat equipped with surface-to-surface missiles came within missile range of U.S. ships on the high seas well away from the Libyan coast. The U.S. commander determined, in light of the Libyan attacks on U.S. aircraft, that this vessel was hostile and therefore ordered U.S. aircraft to engage it. At approximately 2:00 p.m. (EST), U.S. Navy A-6 aircraft fired two Harpoon missiles, which struck and heavily damaged the Libyan vessel. At approximately 4:30 p.m. (EST), a second Libyan patrol boat approached U.S. forces, and was driven off by U.S. Navy aircraft. Shortly after 6:00 p.m. (EST), a third Libyan patrol craft approached the USS YORKTOWN at a high rate of speed; the YORKTOWN fired two Harpoon missiles, which hit the Libyan craft.

Shortly after 12:20 a.m. (EST) on March 25, U.S. Navy A-6 aircraft armed with Harpoon missiles attacked another Libyan craft, apparently resulting in the sinking of that vessel.

All U.S. aircraft returned safely to their carriers, and no casualties or damage were suffered by U.S. forces. The extent of Libyan casualties is not known.

U.S. forces will continue with their current exercises. We will not be deterred by Libyan attacks or threats from exercising our rights on and over the high seas under international law. If Libyan attacks do not cease, we will continue to take the measures necessary in the exercise of our right of self-defense to protect our forces.

The deployment of these United States Armed Forces and the measures taken by them in self-defense during this incident were undertaken pursuant to my authority under the Constitution, including my authority as Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Armed Forces.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ronald Reagan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "R".

The Honorable Strom Thurmond
President pro tempore of the Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

THE WHITE HOUSE

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March 26, 1986

Dear Mr. Speaker:

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ronald Reagan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ronald" and last name "Reagan" clearly distinguishable.

The Honorable Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 26, 1986

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am responding to your letter of March 24 to the President regarding your perceptions of the actions we have taken in the Gulf of Sidra.

First, our maneuvers in the Gulf have long been planned, as part of a global freedom-of-navigation program by which the United States preserves its rights to use international waters and airspace. Numerous similar prior operations did not provoke a response. We obviously cannot be deterred from exercising our rights by Qadhafi's legally baseless claims or by his threats.

We disagree with your claim that our "actions in the Gulf of Sidra have failed to adequately satisfy the requirements of the War Powers Resolution." Nor do we believe that the Resolution was intended to require consultation before conducting naval maneuvers in international waters or airspace. We considered this question carefully and concluded that conducting the operations did not place U.S. forces into hostilities or into a situation in which imminent hostilities were clearly indicated by the circumstances. Contrary to your letter's suggestion, it is not enough under the statute that an operation create "a distinct possibility" of hostilities. After Libya attacked our forces, we notified congressional leaders.

Our plans in this instance have been known to all, including Qadhafi himself. The very purpose of the present operation has been to exercise our rights, openly and unambiguously.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,



William L. Ball, III
Assistant to the President

The Honorable Dante B. Fascell
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515